

MCC Peace Section Task Force on Women in Church & Society REPORT

Report 22

October-November, 1978

FOCUS ON WOMEN AND WORLD CONFERENCE

The tenth Mennonite World Conference, held in Wichita, Kansas, was the largest gathering of Mennonites to date. It was also the largest conference ever held in Wichita.

Mennonite World Conference began on Tuesday evening, July 25, 1978. By Saturday evening, 9,500 persons had registered. An estimated 16,000 persons attended the Saturday night gathering, held at Wichita's Cessna Stadium.

The World Conference symbolized the international composition of the Mennonite church. Persons from 44 countries attended the conference. To insure representation from countries other than North America and Europe, various sources secured money to bring men and women from other parts of the world. Conference registration fees helped cover transportation costs of international representatives. The General Conference Women in Mission organization sponsored the 24-member Taiwan women's choir. The MCC Peace Section Task Force on Women raised funds to bring 15 women from 12 countries--Ethiopia, Rhodesia, Tanzania, Zaire, Zambia, Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Honduras and Puerto Rico.

Seven major addresses reflected on the central theme of the conference, "The Kingdom of God in a Changing World." Conference planners asked for presentations which would promote understanding and fellowship. Million Belete (Kenya), David Schroeder (Canada), Paul Hiebert (United States), Hank B. Kossen (Netherlands), Albert Widjaja (Indonesia), Festo Kivengere (Uganda), and Donald Jacobs (United States) provided input for the main sessions.

The speakers seemed to avoid anything controversial. However, they did confront the issue of world hunger, and challenged us to conserve our resources in order to share more with others.

Following the main presentations, participants gathered in small groups for Bible study, led by persons selected in advance. Discussions centered on understanding and applying the preceding messages, using suggested Biblical references and questions as well as insights from within the groups.

A wide variety of activities took place during the lunch and supper breaks: plays and musical presentations, college and voluntary service reunions, and meetings of youth leaders, pastors, media people, and persons living in community.

While attending World Conference, I particularly tried to note the use of women. The conference featured much good music and the special music slots often

featured female singers. Mary Oyer, music professor at Goshen College, led the group singing for most of the conference sessions.

The Taichung Ladies Choir from Taiwan was well-received. Directed by Ruth Chen Lin, the choir opened the first morning session of the conference. In addition, the choir performed for the children's session and held demonstrations on dancing, beautiful handwriting (calligraphy) and flower arranging. One woman showed how flowers in groups of three are used to form triangles in an arrangement symbolizing heaven, people and earth. The arrangement combined handmade and natural flowers in a simple yet beautiful way.

The seven main speeches of the conference were all given by men, but women were involved in other presentations. Two of the twelve respondents to main presentations were women, Toos Offerhaus of the Netherlands and Anna Juhnke from the United States.

Two women were also included on an eight-person panel on "Facing the Issues": Nadenia Myron and Frances Jackson, both from the U.S.

Women are beginning to make inroads into the World Conference structure. Winifred Beechy represented the Mennonite Church of the U.S. on the World Conference governing body, the Presidium. With the reorganization of structure following this world conference, the Presidium will be renamed the General Council, whose members will include up to three representatives from each country.

Of the 93 General Council members, five will be women, chosen as representatives of their respective countries: Winifred Beechy (U.S., Mennonite Church), Gladys Goering (U.S., General Conference Mennonite Church), J.A. van Ingen and Ds. E. Laan (Dutch Mennonite Brotherhood), and Victoria Vargas (Mennonite Conference in Costa Rica).

In an interview with Victoria Vargas, I learned that Victoria was elected as a Costa Rican church representative rather than several men who had also been nominated. Victoria is employed in the department of public defense in the supreme court system in Costa Rica's capital city, San Jose. She is secretary for the head of the department and is in charge of a pool of eight secretaries in the department. Twenty-five lawyers work in the department. Victoria is an active member of her local church, the Mennonite House of Prayer of Guadalupe. She serves as secretary for the church council and as a young adult Sunday School teacher. In addition, she is secretary for the central committee that unites all the Mennonites of Costa Rica.

Thanks to Marion Preheim, Akron, PA, who wrote and compiled material for this issue. Marion is coordinator of the chaplaincy program at Ephrata Community Hospital and has recently begun working part-time in the Information Services department at MCC headquarters.

RESPONSE TO "THE KINGDOM CONFRONTING THE POWERS"

The following is the response given by Anna Juhnke to the speech on "The Kingdom Confronting the Powers" by Hank Kossen, given at Mennonite World Conference. Anna is an English professor at Bethel College, N. Newton, KS, and a member of MCC's Board of U.S. Ministries.

Mennonites have sometimes defined the powers simply as the governments, which make war and oppress people. Our response has usually been that we won't participate in politics and war.

I am grateful to Dr. Kossen for showing that it is not so easy to separate ourselves as Kingdom people over against the powers. He hasn't actually defined the powers. He rather describes some patterns or processes in the world which work against the Kingdom goals of freedom and unity. In every case, the evil seems to be generated by greed or fear. I find this very enlightening.

We usually think of greed and fear as personal. We pray, "Christ, set me free from them." But when greed and fear live in a group, the group makes them seem normal--or even desirable. For example, greed sets up an idol that we in North America call an adequate middle class standard of living. Our needs keep expanding. But we are proud, not ashamed, that middle-class living now includes air conditioning, a dishwasher, a color TV, and a second car. We also consider it normal for all men--and an increasing number of women--to give their money-making job top priority in their lives. Can sisters and brothers of other cultures show us how to break this particular captivity to the powers?

Fear sets up an idol called national security. The nations bow down and sacrifice their wealth to it. In the U.S. even the President does not dare to challenge the size of the military budget.

As Dr. Kossen has shown us, the evil processes become magnified on the world scale. The national security issue is part of the East-West struggle, which is generated by fear. And our standard of living is part of the greed that generates the North-South struggle, of rich nations exploiting the poor nations. We who are feeling a worldwide sisterhood and brotherhood this week must cry out prophetically against these worldwide powers.

But we should not be tempted again to oversimplify and say the evil powers really are the governments and the multi-national corporations that bind us from outside. Let us look again at evil patterns of society that have a grip on us from inside because we consider them normal. These are the ones we must combat if we are to start living in the Kingdom now.

Fear of anybody who is different sets us evil patterns of separation. Why do we consider it normal to have MB's, GC's, MC's and all the rest? Even within a congregation we may be afraid to gather seriously around the scriptures for guidance, the way Dr. Kossen suggests. We in North America know that if serious questions of interpretation come up, we may find ourselves still replaying the old fundamentalist-modernist controversy. Or maybe facing a new split between charismatics and noncharismatics.

Fear leads to evil patterns of separation. Divisions between races and tribes are old and deep everywhere in the world. Why do we consider it normal that the different races live in different parts of the city and do not worship together in the same churches? We are captives to the evil powers in so many ways.

Suppression of women is also a pattern that is deeply ingrained throughout our world. Greed must be behind the economic injustices, like unequal wages. But we know that there is fear too, when we see the angry opposition to women's equality in the U.S. Jesus broke the Jewish laws and customs that bound women in his time. It makes me sad to see some Christian churches try to shove women back instead of supporting their growth. They make an idol of the narrow role that women were allowed in the home and church in the nineteenth century. If male domination over females is considered normal, we are captive to the evil

powers of our history and need Christ to set us free. We even need to be set free from the power of our language. (Let's not talk about "men" and "the brotherhood" when we mean "people" and "the fellowship".)

Praise God that Christ can set individuals free, before the society or even the church is ready. A family can start to live a simple lifestyle and give to the poor. A couple can refuse to pay war tax. A man can be set free from racial prejudice. A women can be freed into power and confidence.

But the Kingdom comes into being within a community. Can a group covenant to live more simply, to share goods, and to help each other and their neighbors through financial crises? We have brothers and sisters here today who can teach us from their experiences.

Can the Christian fellowship provide support and encouragement for the lonely prophet or the member who conscientiously breaks the law?

Can the church become the body of Christ in which there is neither MC nor GC, neither black nor white, neither Jew nor Greek, slave or free, male or female?

Growth to become this kind of Kingdom community will cause an increase of conflict among us. Growth is painful and uneven. But Christ has taught us how to love, in the midst of conflict. His Holy Spirit is among us to guide and heal our brokenness. And he has promised us grace to overcome the world.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP MEALS ATTENDED BY OVER 600

North American women welcomed international guests in English, Japanese, Dutch, Taiwanese, Spanish, French, and German to open the program at the International Women's Buffet on Wednesday evening at the Holiday Inn in Wichita. It was one of two meals for women planned in conjunction with the Mennonite World Conference. The other international women's meal was a sack lunch at the Broadview Hotel on Thursday noon.

Both events were sponsored by the Mennonite Central Committee Peace Section Task Force on Women in Church and Society who raised funds for 16 women from Third World countries to attend the World Conference. They were among the international guests of North American women at the fellowship meals which were attended by a total of 635 women.

Mennonite women from 23 countries--Honduras, Puerto Rico, Columbia, Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Austria, France, the Netherlands, Germany, Zambia, Zaire, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Rhodesia, India, Japan, Indonesia, Taiwan, the Philippines, Australia, Canada, and the United States attended the Wednesday evening meal. After a roll call of the nations, which chairperson Malinda Nikkel of Newton, Kansas, described as "emphasizing our separateness", the group "emphasized our unity by singing together in all the languages represented at the dinner," led by Joan Wiebe of Newton, Kansas.

A women's handbell choir from the Bethel College Mennonite Church of North Newton, Kansas, played three numbers, directed by Eleanor Kaufman. Anola Waters, vice-chairman for the Mennonite Indian Leaders' Council in Oklahoma, gave a sign-language rendition of the 23rd Psalm.

At the Thursday noon lunch, discussion groups centered around the church involvement of women in attendance. At least five of the women were in the pastoral ministry. Others served on church boards and councils or as deacons. Some were leaders in interdenominational groups such as Church Women United. Writers of church publications, curriculum materials, and books for children and adults were in the group. Several of the women did volunteer work to support the Mennonite Central Committee work in overseas development.

"If we have a message to the world it should be that those of us from Europe and North America who are the wealthy have a duty to help people from the Third World who have nothing," a lady from the Netherlands said when asked why she had come to the world conference. "We can do with less," she challenged the members of her discussion group.

In addition to the countries represented at the Wednesday buffet, women from Switzerland, Paraguay, Jamaica, Mexico, and Uruguay attended the Thursday lunch. Several of the guests at the lunch were Mennonite Central Committee trainees who have just completed one-year volunteer assignments in the United States.

Each woman who attended either international meal received a gift of an art print, "Wheatscape", designed by Ethel Abrahams, an artist from Hillsboro, Kansas, who was introduced during the program following the Wednesday buffet.

Hostesses at both international women's meals were from Canada and the United States. An ad hoc inter-Mennonite women's committee--Herta Funk, Esther Hess, Joan Wiebe, Thelma Kauffman, Adena Nachtigall and Gladys Goering--planned the events.

LaVonne Platt is a freelance writer from Newton, Kansas

MWC WOMEN DISCUSS ROLES AT LUNCHEON

The Thursday luncheon for women at Mennonite World Conference, sponsored by the Peace Section Task Force on Women provided a time for sharing and discussion rather than a formal program. To facilitate interaction, the women were divided into eight small groups. Group leaders first asked each woman to tell her name, where she was from, what activities she was involved in at home and why she came to World Conference. Each group selected a recorder to gather information about the kind of women who came to World Conference.

Most women affirmed their role in rearing a family, but the diversity of involvements outside of the home also underlined the fact that women everywhere have many gifts to offer, both as married and single persons.

Many said they have given generously of their time as volunteers in the church and community, as teachers in Sunday School and weekday nurseries, deaconesses in churches, members of local school boards, volunteers in MCC self-help and second-hand shops and workers in local prisons. One 87-year-old woman said she makes 25 comforters in a year.

Many women present at the luncheon spoke of their need for growth and development in the years after their children were fully grown. Some chose to find an outlet in the traditional roles of teacher, nurse, lab worker, librarian, writer, artist, floral designer and social worker. Some are branching out into new fields for women: school administration, church pastoring, new kinds of counselling, hospital chaplaincy, managing a business and teaching in colleges and universities.

Women also noted that they are being used more on local and national committees within the structure of the church.

Women had various responses to the question, "Why did you come to World Conference?" Some of the answers were: to satisfy a dream, to meet people from other parts of the world, to bring their children to a world gathering of Mennonites, to get an international view of the world, to broaden their outlook, to see people they knew and to hear what the issues are that concern other Mennonites.

The leaders of each group also asked the women, "What do you think needs done for the women in your country?" Some felt that more needs to be done even in the most progressive situations. Women themselves need to be encouraged to use their gifts and talents. Since most have good health after their child nurturing years, they should develop themselves for service during that time. One woman was concerned that women should not take over men's roles and that women's liberation has gone too far.

One group brought out the difference of economic levels in looking at women's activities. For example, lower class women spend nearly all their time caring for their families' needs. Middle class women find more time for activities outside the home. Upper class women often have servants and can spend time learning, socializing and serving in volunteer and paid activities.

A Latin American woman noted that males have a machismo image, that is, an authoritarian stance, to preserve. Actually, the male is simply a figurehead, she said, because the society is really matriarchal with the women holding much of the power in the family.

In many countries women are beginning to see a career as an option and marriage does not have the high priority it used to have. Even so, women still tend to fill a servant role in meeting the needs around them.

by Marion Preheim

WOMEN AND THE CHURCH: INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Elizabeth and Perry Yoder of North Newton, Kansas, teamed up for a workshop called "Men and Women in the Church." They held two sessions, one on Thursday and the other on Friday, July 27 and 28. The Thursday session featured a panel of women reflecting on the situation of men and women where they live.

One of the panelists was Erika Laan of The Netherlands. She said there are no differences in their churches in Holland between men and women. Many women are working in the church. (Erika herself is a pastor.) She feels women should say more even when they don't have the right in their country.

She stated, however, that the rate of progress for women has slowed down somewhat and gave reasons why:

1. Many men and women are convinced that having women as leaders is unbiblical.
2. Women do not tend to support and encourage other women. Women have been given leadership, but they are sometimes quiet. For example, one woman when asked about the issues in the church said she was too busy to bother about that.
3. Women are not always well prepared and therefore not as qualified as men. The educational process is different for women. Also, their expectations are

are different from those of men. Because of this women need to encourage their daughters to handle their situation differently.

Erika said that we do have a biblical basis for women working in the church. Paul considered women as full-fledged workers. The New Testament records that Priscilla taught Paul. Luke's daughters were prophetesses. So was Huldah of the Old Testament who gave God's word to Josiah at a time when there was a male prophet in the land.

Finally, Ms. Laan cautioned that we don't want to accept the tactics or tone of the women's liberation movement.

Another panelist, Frauke Fast of Germany, said that theoretically men and women have the same rights in society and the church, but practically the balance is not the same. Women theological students in her country usually marry, so they don't have female pastors. Men do the important things in church, as they do in the business world. Women in church life tend to do the social things, as well as lead Bible classes and serve as deaconesses. She knows of one lay priest. Why do they have such an unbalanced situation? Frauke feels that women's roles in the church are a reflection of the male-oriented society.

Brazilian Susie Penner explained that she represents the Portuguese church, not the traditional Brazilian church.

She stated that a major problem in Brazil is the prevalence of broken families. Where Christ is a part of the family, though, there is a difference in the family life. A Christian woman makes a difference in family life because a woman is at the heart of the family.

Ms. Penner said that in the 23 Brazilian congregations it was often the women who accepted the gospel first. In this way, women had a chance to serve before their husbands actually came into the church. However, the leadership in the church is held by men. The women usually stand beside the men and help with the work of teaching Sunday School, visiting homes and hospitals and leading Bible study groups.

In the Thursday session, a Nigerian stated that women participate in the leadership of the church, including the highest positions. This is in stark contrast to the way in which women are treated in the culture.

An Ethiopian explained that the revolution in Ethiopia has elevated the status of women. Women serve on the local council of the church. Women's attitudes are more of a problem than the attitudes of the men. The women aren't educated and aren't aware of their own abilities.

A woman from Japan noted that the highest percentage of their church members are women, but all the leaders are men. If a particular church has any men at all, the tendency is to ask the men to take the leadership.

In India, the Christian church has done as much as any institution to raise the status of women. One of the first Indians to serve as a deacon was a woman. Women are recognized as equals with men on boards and committees. However, pastors and delegates to conferences are men.

The Jamaicans find that their women are not educated and this really restricts their activity as leaders in the church. Nonetheless, they have had one woman on the board of the Jamaican Mennonite Church.

Several persons commented about the situation in the United States. One person noted that she knew a woman with pastoral gifts who felt like she was a "circus act" because people would say, "Look what she can do." Another person pointed out that pastoral leadership is generally done on a team basis in the U.S. churches. She also said that whether women are used as pastors differs according to the conference, i.e., the Virginia Conference (MC) has no women in the pulpit. Women in leadership positions other than the pastorate are often in token capacities. Since we now have more women in seminary, however, more women may be accepted in leadership positions in the future.

Other general comments made during the discussion related to the fact that all conference speakers were men. It was noted that the MCC Peace Section Task Force on Women had tried to get more participation of women, and emphasized that we do need to continue to get in at the planning stages. Otherwise it's a process of the "boy's club" where the men on the planning committee pick men because that's who they know. They don't think of women because they don't know their gifts as well. Someone commented that women need to say "yes" when asked to do something because sometimes women tend to feel inferior and refuse difficult tasks.

In discussing ways to encourage women's involvement in leadership capacities, the following comments were made:

"As Mennonite women we need to become extremely well qualified. We need to understand the system. There is a system of politics alive in the church."

"We should have women who are qualified on a committee."

"We don't need to be 'super' women. We do need to use our gifts, however."

"I'm for a token woman if it's the only way we're going to get a woman in."

"The same Holy Spirit is in a woman as in a man."

"We need to become more aware of our gifts--in men and women."

The Friday session included a presentation by Perry and Liz Yoder on interpreting Biblical passages relating to men and women.

NEWS

PERSONS IN MINISTRY CONFERENCE

Akron Mennonite Church, Akron, PA, will host the Persons in Ministry Conference, October 27-29, 1978. The conference will bring together women and men who are interested in ministry roles in Mennonite church organizations. Persons in Ministry conferences strive to strengthen the self-concept of Mennonite women, urge that women be accepted in leadership positions in the church and provide support for each other in the development of our talents. Arlene May, psychologist, will give the opening address on "Dealing with Damaged Emotions." Saturday sessions will include input by Dorothy Yoder Nyce on "Women in the Pulpit Ministry in Nineteenth Century U.S.", "Women in the Ministry Among Mennonites in My Lifetime" by Ruth Brunk Stoltzfus and a panel discussion on "Women in the Structure of the Church--Acceptable Ways of Asserting." Willard Swartley, Bible scholar, will lead two sessions exploring the theme "Men, Women and Power" and Emma Richards, pastor, will bring the Sunday morning message.

* * *

"A Biblical Understanding of Women and Men in the Church," an MCC-sponsored conference will be held November 24-26 at Camp Adams in Canby, Oregon. Herta

Funk, director of adult education and women's roles in the church, General Conference Mennonite church, and Harold Bauman, staff person for Congregational Ministries, the Mennonite Church will be resource persons. Registration fee of \$5.00 (non-returnable) is to be sent to La Vernae Dick, 588 S.W. Maple Street, Dallas, OR, 97338 before November 1, checks payable to MCC Conference on Women.

The conference is limited to 75 persons. It is likely there will be openings for extra participants. For information contact La Vernae Dick, telephone 503-623-2188 or Nancy Lapp, 3220 S. Shore Drive, Albany, OR, 97321, telephone 503-926-3493.

* * *

The Task Force on Women will hold its semi-annual meeting at Hesston, Kansas on December 2. The task force welcomes your feedback concerning the Report, including topics/concerns which you feel should be addressed in future issues or by the Task Force as a whole.

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SINGLE-WOMAN AMERICAN HOUSEHOLDS ARE INCREASING, CENSUS REPORT

taken from the Washington Post, August 14, 1978

The number of American family households headed by a single or divorced woman has increased by 46 percent since 1970, the government reported yesterday. But the majority of households still consists of married couples.

A new Census Bureau report showed that in March 1978 about 8 million, or 11 percent of the country's 76 million households, were headed by a woman with no husband present. That represents an increase of 2.6 million, or 6 percent, during this decade, the report said.

About 83 percent of the country's 57.2 million families were maintained jointly by a husband and wife; 3 percent by a man with no wife present and 14 percent by a woman with no husband present.

What these statistics don't show is the percentage of women who are bread-winners, which I'm sure is higher than 11% or 14%. --Betsy Beyler, Washington, D.C.

* * *

VERBS

Nancy Hostetler, Edmonton, Alberta, writer of the study guide, Affirming Our Faith in Word and Deed directed a three-session study at a teacher training workshop held September 16 at the Bethany Mennonite Church, Albany, Oregon. The sessions were designed for those planning to teach the course in their congregations. She also shared a message with the Mennonite Church in Lebanon, Oregon, September 17, a.m.

Marjorie Nofziger, Lebanon, OR, who shares equal responsibilities with her husband for their farming operation, was invited to teach a mission study on "Contemporary China" for the Oregon-Idaho Conference of United Methodist Women last summer. Marjorie and her husband, who visited the Peoples Republic of China in 1976, made over 40 presentations on China to various groups since their visit.

Nancy S. Lapp, Albany, OR, served recently as a resource person for a retreat for voluntary service unit leaders, held in Elkhart, IN.

* * *

FROM OUR LETTER FILE

The Report serves as a valuable resource in a wide variety of situations. Excerpts from the following letters provide glimpses into some of the interesting situations in which the Report is being read and used.

"Dear Friends at Headquarters,

Please, please put us on the mailing list for MCC Peace Section News (letter) and also for "Report" . . . Joan Gerig called my attention to the fact that I haven't been getting this information for all these years. No wonder I've felt a bit deprived! We are planning to be in Botswana for one more year so do please get us on your mailing list at once

Sincerely,

Erna Weaver

Selebi-Pikwe, Botswana

"Dear Gayle,

Please include Judy Wasylycia-Leis, Ottawa, Ontario on your mailing list for MCC Peace Section Task Force on Women in Church and Society. Please send her all the mailings past and present.

Judy is in chage of the Women's division on the New Democratic Party (NDP), a national political party in Canada. She is very sensitive to the needs, roles, and aspirations of women and is open to new ideas and concepts. Judy was also an unsuccessful candidate in the last provincial election in Ontario.

June Leis

Tavistock, Ontario

The *Report* is a bi-monthly publication of the MCC Peace Section Task Force on Women in Church And Society. Correspondence should be sent to Gayle Gerber Koontz, 27 Fairlawn St., Everett, MA 02149.

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